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**IRISH HAND-WOVEN LINEN DAMASK**

**HOW AND WHY  
IT IS DISTINGUISHED**



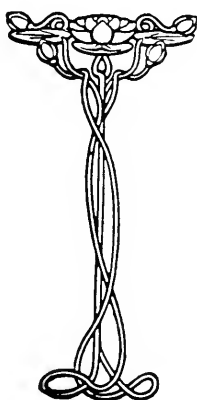




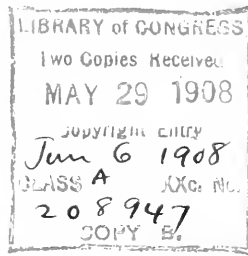




THE  
HAND LOOM  
LINEN  
WEAVERS  
OF IRELAND  
AND THEIR  
WORK



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JAMES WHITE



### THE GREATER POWER.

We prate much, boasting, of the might of steam,  
And what its throbbing energies have done;  
We tell of wealth and glory shrewdly won  
From intricate devices, where the gleam  
That lights the clouds becomes a golden stream  
Of wire-sent power, stupendous: Is there none  
Of forces else to praise beneath the sun?  
These, of themselves, were but a worthless dream.  
Aye! One thing more the world of work demands,  
Ere labor can arrive at any goal —  
A human force more firm than turning bands,  
And more enduring than all wheels that roll:  
A man, with skill and patience in his hands —  
A man, with strength and courage in his soul!

— *Margaret Ashmun, in The Technical World.*

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# L I N E N

B

EGINNING with the first recorded reference to any known fabric, where it is said in the 42d verse of the 41st chapter of Genesis: "And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck;" 3,600 years ago, the use of fine linen has ever been associated with social refinement and gentility.

Unlike many of the ornaments of well-ordered and well-furnished homes, there is no chance of the question being asked, regarding fine linen of any sort, "After all, of what use is it?" for there is no woman who does not know, either from possession, or the hope of possession, the pleasure of an abundance of this most serviceable of household necessities.



PULLING AND BOTTLING THE FLAX NEAR BANBRIDGE, COUNTY DOWN

Unlike almost all other crops, flax is not cut, but pulled from the earth; the two chief reasons for this method being to preserve as long a fibre as possible and the difficulty of shearing it on account of its wiry strength



ANOTHER VIEW OF FLAX-PULLING NEAR BANBRIDGE,  
INCLUDING TWO LEARNERS

Nature presents the cotton fiber to man in a finished state, that is, ready for the spindles to be put in yarn form, and by the cheapest of labor; but not so flax, which must be pulled from the earth by the roots, submerged in water in what is called a flax-hole for about three weeks, termed retting, spread on grass for two more weeks that the woody part may harden and become brittle enough to be broken and separated from the fiber by scutching, before it can be spun into yarn.

These various manipulations, coupled with the precarious nature of flax crops, make the first cost of linen goods higher than cotton; but their longer life, absorbent quality and greater beauty more than repay the larger outlay and invite the application to them of the truth, that the recollection of quality remains long after the price is forgotten.

As an instance of long use and service, one has only to think of the body of Rameses II., the Pharaoh of the oppression, standing erect to-day in the Museum of Ghizeh, near Cairo, Egypt, sheathed in linen hand-made over 3,200 years ago, or of Cleopatra reclining in the British Museum, London, wrapped in the same material, for over 1,900 years.

Much could be written of the various kinds and styles of linen goods, from the plain up to the embroidered and lace productions worth their weight in gold; but we will consider only one branch or division, about which all women know something, some know a great deal, and none but would like to know more — Damask.

Damask takes its name from the city of Damascus where the fabric was originally made, as was also the famed cutlery-ware which is made of the old iron found in ancient buildings, the blades being made to appear damasked or watered.

Present-day linen damask is of two kinds or makes, namely: hand-woven, and steam or power woven; and while formerly it was all of the hand-woven variety, to-day there is relatively very little of it made, and indeed there are many large stocks, especially in this country, where a set of hand-woven damask could not be found.

Steam or power loom damask is woven in Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Belgium, Austria and France, and there are some of the coarser lines produced in this country, but, both in hand and steam power, Ireland is first in point of volume as well as in quality.

It is on account of superior quality that Ulster, the northern Irish province, leads in volume, for certainly Germany and France, not to mention Scotland, can not be said to be slow in commercial competition.

U. S. Consul S. S. Knabenshue of Belfast writes as follows in regard to the manufacture of linen in Ireland (Daily Consular and Trade Reports, No. 3096, issued by the Government at Washington, D. C., Monday, February 10, 1908):



THE SAME GROUP FROM ANOTHER POINT



SUBMERGING THE FLAX IN WATER (A "FLAX HOLE")

Where it will remain weighted down by stones for three weeks, the retting process

## PROCESSES IN ULSTER — AMERICA IS THE BEST CUSTOMER.

The methods pursued are the same as in the mills of the Continent. The excellence of Irish linens is due to the skillful training of the workmen, the intelligent and progressive management, and the care exercised at every step of the process from the time the scutched flax is taken in hand by the spinners until the finished product is stored in the warehouse.

In the city of Belfast — excluding all establishments elsewhere in Ulster — there are 20 flax-spinning mills, employing about 20,000 persons of both sexes; 31 weaving mills (here called "power-loom factories") employing about 14,000 persons, and about 110 working warehouses, with about 5,000 employees — making a total of 39,000 persons directly employed in the production of linen goods. It is estimated that an equal number find employment in cognate industries, such as the preparation of the manufactured goods for the market, the manufacture of chemicals for bleaching, the making of cartons and other coverings for certain classes of goods, and in various minor industries depending on the linen trade. This gives something like 78,000 persons who find employment in Belfast in the linen and allied industries. From this it is a reasonable estimate that from 120,000 to 130,000 persons are dependent, directly or indirectly, upon the linen industry for support, out of a total population of 360,000.

Nearly all the Ulster linen firms have offices or selling agencies in Belfast. In all Ireland there are 49 spinning firms, some with several mills each, and 16 of them having weaving mills also; and 85 firms having weaving mills alone. In 1906 the total number of spindles in all Ireland was 869,146; total number of power looms, 34,723. Besides these, the hand looms still remaining in damask weaving must not be forgotten.





#### TAKING THE FLAX FROM THE WATER

Rather an unpleasant job, as the decayed woody part has, to most people, an offensive odor



#### SPREADING THE FLAX ON THE GRASS

To be sun-dried for about two weeks



LIFTING THE FLAX WHEN THOROUGHLY DRY  
It is then taken to the Scutching-mill for the removal of the woody part

#### FLAX SUPPLY — LINEN EXPORTS.

The linen mills require a much larger quantity of flax than the total amount raised in Ireland. Scutched flax — which is the fiber alone, with the woody portions of the stalk, and other useless portions, removed — is the raw material for the spinners. The farmer who raises the flax pulls it, rets it, takes it to the nearest scutching mill and has it scutched, and then sells it to the buyers for the mills. In 1906, the total production of Ireland was 11,812 tons (of 2,240 pounds each) of scutched flax. The net imports required by the mills were 34,056 tons, of which more than half came from Russia, and the remainder from Belgium, Holland, and small amounts from southeastern Europe. Large quantities of foreign-spun linen yarn are also imported by the weaving mills, but these are counterbalanced by the exports of Irish-spun yarn.

It is impossible to get figures as to the total output of linens from Belfast alone. The best that can be done is to give the official figures of the exports of linen goods from all Ireland to Great Britain and all other countries, from the report for 1905, issued by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland. The quantities of linen fabrics are given in hundredweights of 112 pounds each:

	Exports.	Estimated value.
Linen yarn . . . . . pounds	18,699,803	\$5,782,453
Linen goods . . . . . hundredweights	1,018,706	37,181,496
Total estimated value . . . . .	.....	\$42,963,949



From Stereograph; copyright, 1903, by Underwood & Underwood, New York

### HACKLING FLAX

The first process in the spinning of yarn. Very unhealthy work on account of the great amount of fine dust released

There are no statistics showing the destination of the linens manufactured in Ireland and exported, from the fact that much of the product of Irish mills is bought by firms in England, and by them either sold to the British retail trade or exported to other countries. But of the total exports of linens from the United Kingdom the United States takes about half. The quantity and value of linen piece goods exported from the United Kingdom and the share purchased by the United States for the past three calendar years have been as follows:

Linen piece goods.	1905.	
	Yards.	Value.
Total to all countries .....	183,445,900	\$23,563,000
United States .....	103,069,800	12,335,848
	1906.	
	Yards.	Value.
Total to all countries .....	190,957,700	\$25,923,627
United States .....	110,987,700	13,985,276
	1907.	
	Yards.	Value.
Total to all countries .....	185,011,000	\$26,895,014
United States .....	107,194,600	14,970,051



YOUNG LADY CUTTING OR PERFORATING CARDS FOR DAMASK PATTERN



OFFICE DAY AT A PROMINENT MANUFACTURER'S  
When the weavers come with the damask, get paid for their work and take  
away more yarn to be woven at home

#### COTTAGE AND FACTORY WORK.

As a rule, linen goods are woven "in the gray"—that is, before bleaching. They are then sent to the bleaching establishments, which are necessarily in the country, away from the smoke and dust of the cities, which would discolor the linen when on the bleaching green. The fabrics are submitted to the action of chemicals, and then spread on the grass, where, under the combined influences of the chemicals, frequent moistening, sun and air, the gray color is changed to the snowy whiteness of the goods as exhibited in the stores. The bleaching greens, with their long webs of linen spread out, many hundreds of yards at one time, are a source of unfailing interest to tourists in Ulster. The bleacheries also give the final finish to the linens through the processes of beetling and laundering.

There are a number of large linen houses in Belfast which do not operate mills, but have their goods made to order, or else purchase staple lines of linens in bulk from the manufacturers to supply their trade. Another branch is the embroidered linen trade. The pattern is drawn on linen cloth, and the pieces given out to women and girls to embroider. Hemstitched handkerchiefs, etc., are also dealt with in this way. The local grocer or other tradesman in the small villages, often many miles away, acts as agent to place the work with the cottage women in his locality; receives the work, pays for the labor, and returns the finished articles to the house. Very often these articles are returned badly soiled, and with a strong odor of peat smoke, but the laundering removes all this.

The law does not allow the employment of children under fourteen years of age, but the linen mills employ large numbers of boys and girls over fourteen at from \$1 to \$2 per week. The hours of labor in the linen industry (and in all

other manufacturing enterprises in Belfast) are from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M., with an hour off from 8 to 9, when the workers go home to breakfast, and from 1 to 2 to lunch. The law does not permit employees to remain in their workrooms during the breakfast and lunch hours for any purpose whatever; so they must go out of the building for these meals, unless the mill owner provides a dining-room entirely apart from the workrooms — which all the large mills do. On Saturday the mills close at noon, thus giving a work week of 54 hours.

It will be noticed the Consul says: “ Besides these the hand looms still remaining in damask-weaving must not be forgotten,” a sentence that carries in it a chord of sadness such as runs through Tennyson’s immortal description of “ The Charge of the Light Brigade ” at Balaklava.

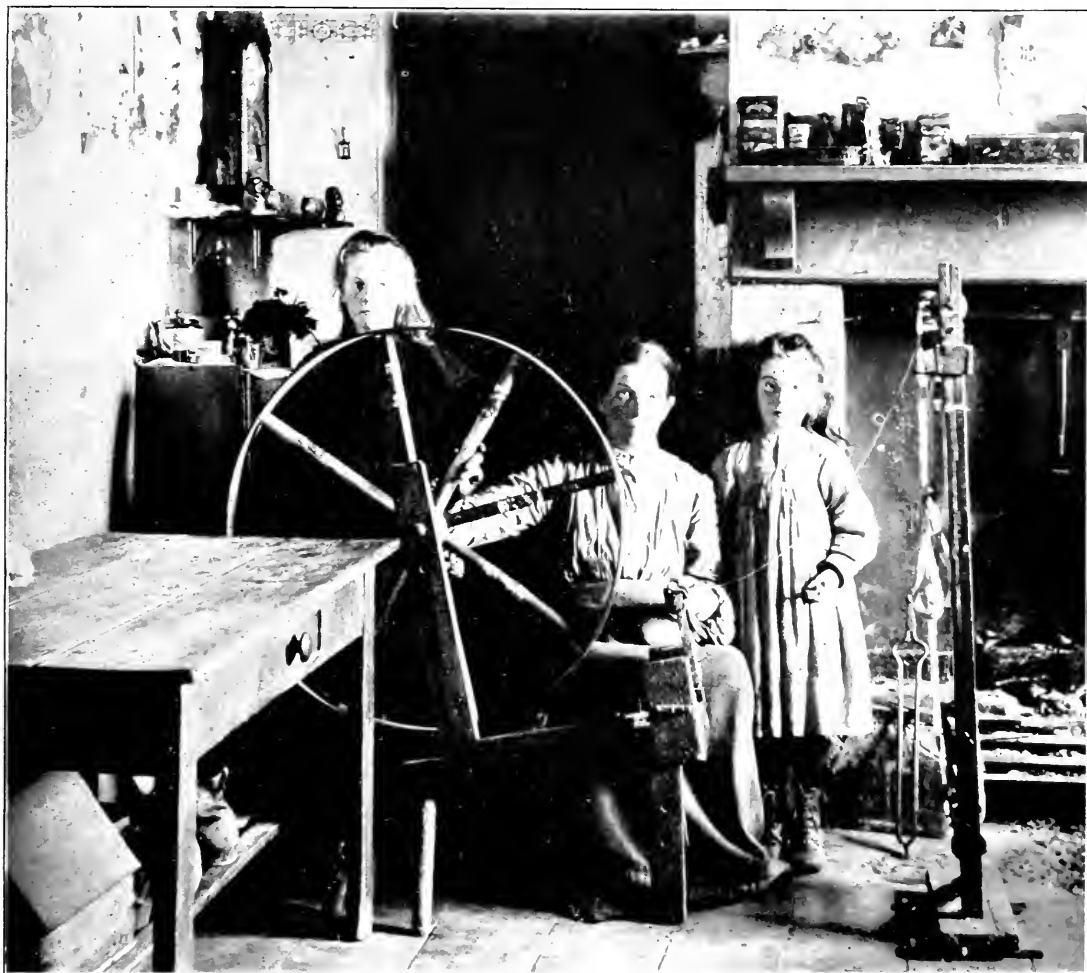
This richest form into which flax yarn is woven was first introduced into Ireland from Continental countries at the close of the seventeenth century by a



A ROW OF WEAVERS' COTTAGES IN WARINGSTOWN, COUNTY DOWN

No railway or street-car line disturbs the serenity of this ancient village of about 400 inhabitants, where the curfew bell still rings as it has done for over 200 years





#### A WEAVER'S WIFE WINDING BOBBINS

The weft, which is given the weaver in hanks (a hank contains 3,000 yards), must be put on bobbins before it is ready for the shuttle. Unfortunately this work, which is usually done by some female member of the weaver's family, as well as the time necessary to adjust the warp, cards, etc., in the loom, is at present thrown in gratis, there being no price put on it.

No doubt, however, the weavers, if a revival of their industry can be brought about, will see to it that their good wives and helpers will get some pin-money for their services, as they are certainly entitled to it

Samuel Waring, who brought over a colony of weavers and settled them in what is now the village of Waringstown, County Down, in 1697. This village is still the center of what is left of the hand-loom industry.

The prevailing custom in the making of Irish hand-woven linen damask is this: The loom which is in the home of the weaver is either owned or rented by him, and kept in a room with an earthen floor, as a rule, for the yarns can be best handled in a humid atmosphere. (To illustrate this feature, it was found in exhibiting an Irish damask hand loom, operated by a skilled weaver brought over for the purpose, in Madison Square Garden, New York, January and February

of this year, that the yarns could not be handled successfully on account of the dry atmosphere.)

The weaver goes to the manufacturer who supplies him with the yarn, warp and weft, and the cards necessary to weave the pattern desired by the manufacturer, takes them home, adjusts them in the loom, weaves the web, brings it back and gets paid the agreed price per yard for the work.

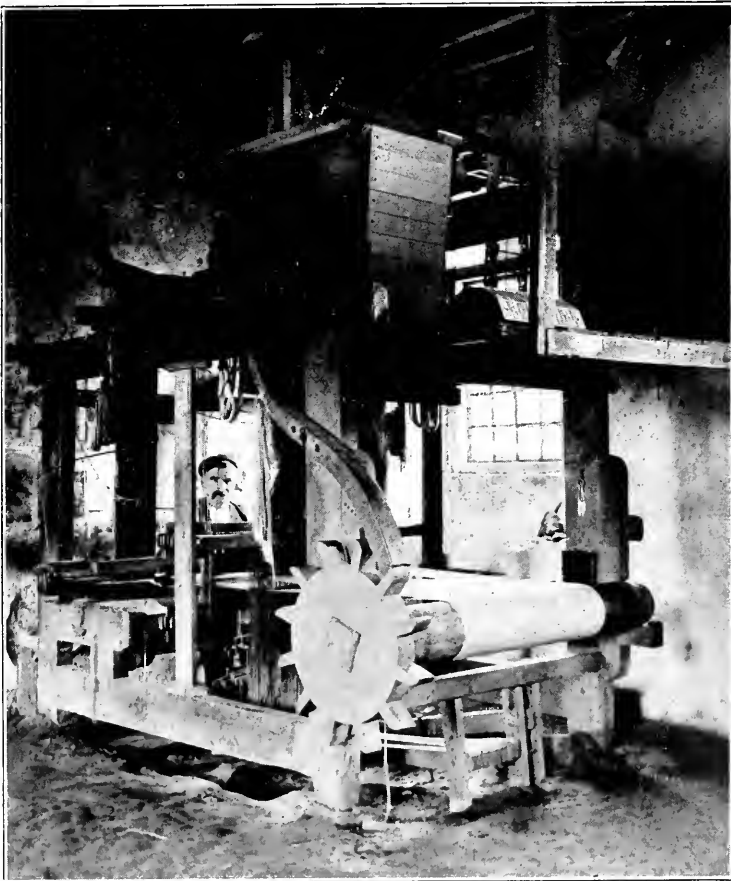
This custom applies also to other linen hand-loom products.

A system of fines for imperfect work tends to preserve a high degree of perfection.

Up to the present time there has been no distinguishing mark used by the weavers that would inform the purchaser whether the goods offered for sale were hand or steam power woven, but just now the weavers are endeavoring to bring about a change, and are asking the privilege of weaving in each table-cloth and napkin the words: "Irish Hand-woven Linen Damask," in small unobtrusive letters in the margin.

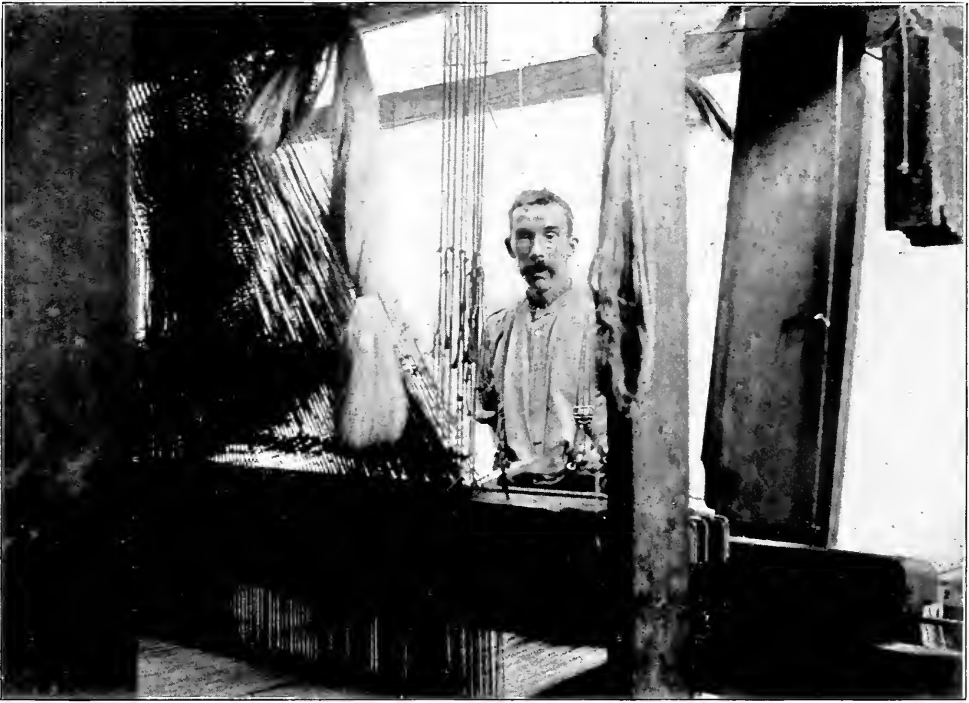
A Bill compelling all manufacturers to so mark their product has had its first reading in the House of Commons.

The cause of this desired change is the lessened demand for their product, as the steam or power loom goods have for over fifty years steadily supplanted the hand-woven article.



A LINEN DAMASK WEAVER AT WORK IN HIS HOME





ANOTHER WEAVER AT HIS LOOM

It was the hand-loom weavers of Ireland, who, by their untiring energy and industry, created the sentiment that surrounds Irish Linen, that sentiment which always attaches to the best of any hand-produced article, whether it be rug, engraving, piece of sculpture, lace or other luxury of life.

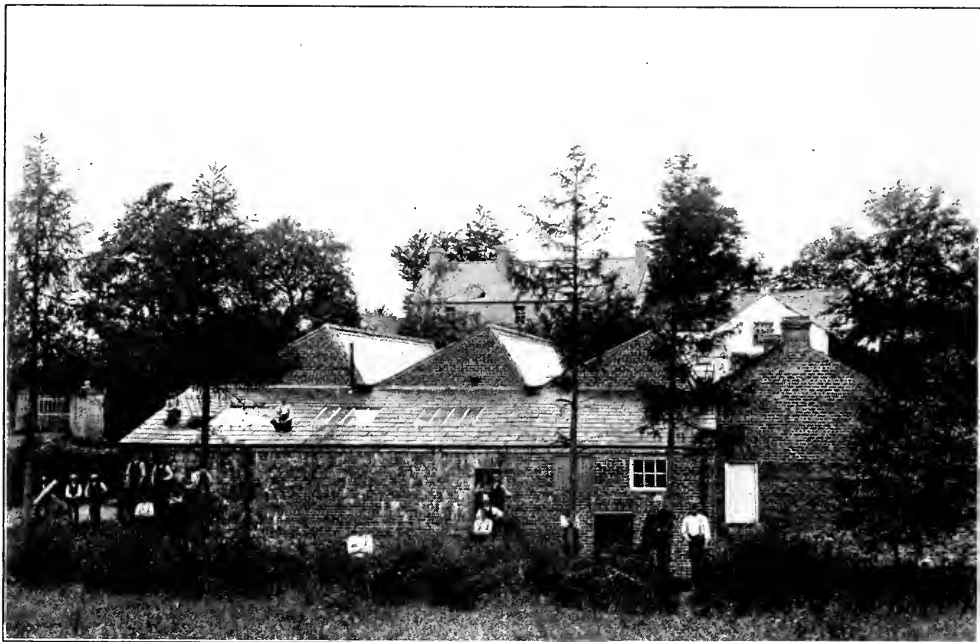
This sentiment has been used to the limit in pushing the sale of power-loom damask all over the world, even, it is said, to the extent of substitution, the second-class machine article for the superior hand-loom first, and the volume of the steam product is so great in proportion to the whole, that in a sense it overshadows the finer hand-woven fraction.

It was even said at first that buyers of damask in this country would object to the words "Irish Hand-woven Linen Damask" being woven in the goods.

Where is the lady who would object to her purchases of silverware being marked "sterling" or her gold "22 carat"? The truth is these metals could not be sold at their proper value unless so marked.

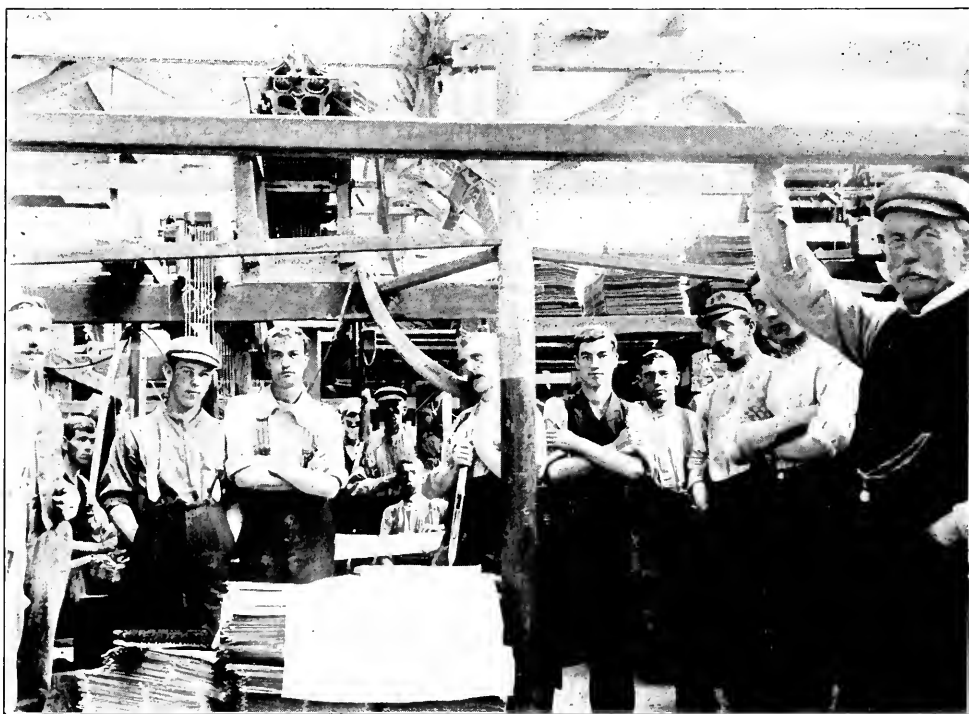
Can it be conceived that a hostess, entertaining friends, and feeling pride in the elegance of her silverware, her Coalport, Doulton, Dresden, Wedgewood or Worcester china, all plainly marked, would be ashamed to display genuine Irish hand-woven linen damask having in it, even less plainly distinguishable, its proof of genuineness, a fabric that is conceded by all authorities to stand alone at the head of white table goods.

It could not be truthfully said that these words are in the nature of an advertisement, any more than the word "sterling" in silver is.

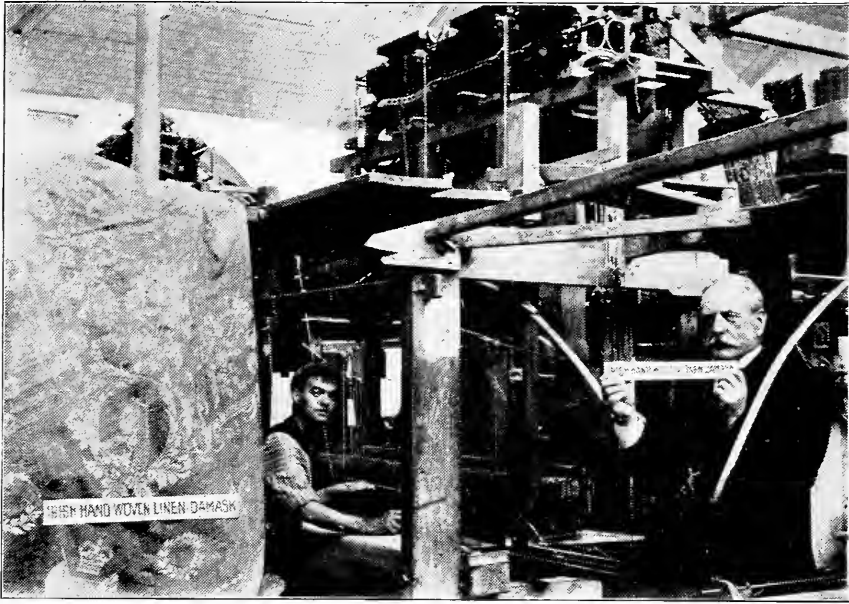


EXTERIOR OF A HAND-LOOM DAMASK FACTORY

Where all of the product has woven in each table-cloth and napkin  
 "Irish Hand-woven Linen Damask"



INTERIOR OF THE FOREGOING



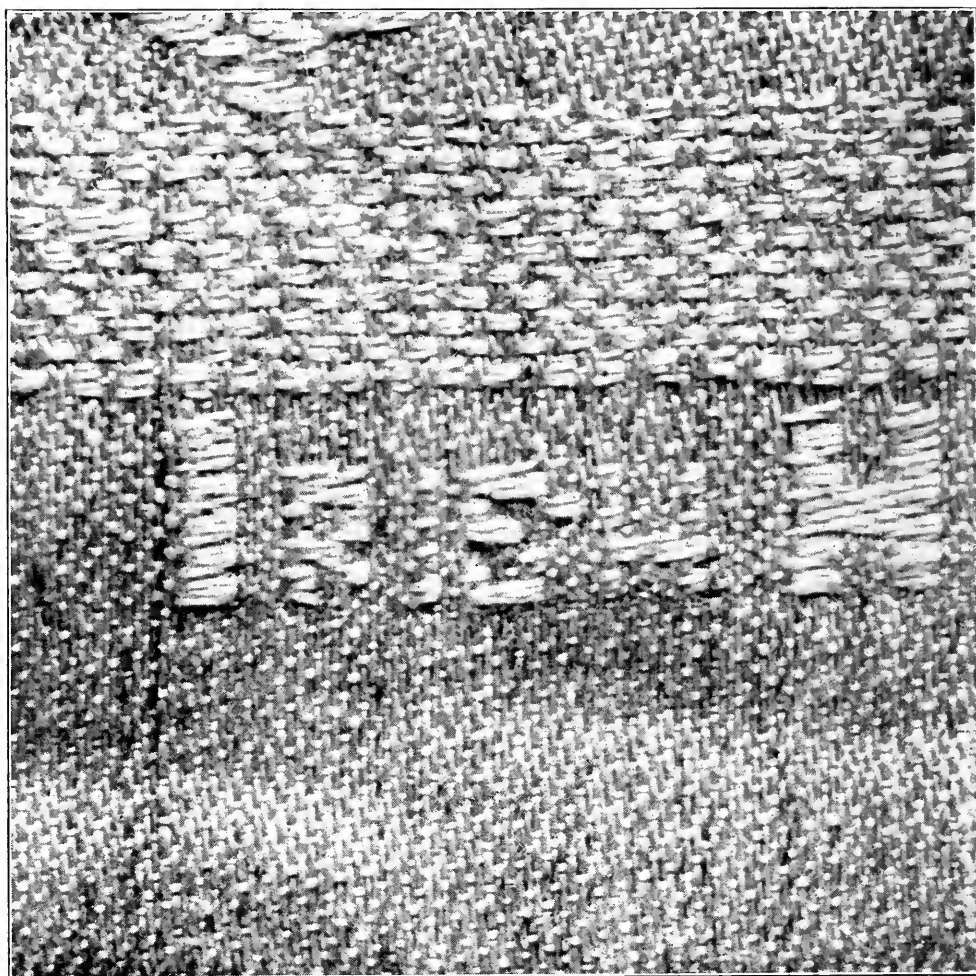
A YOUNG WEAVER AT THE LOOM, AND THE FIRST EMPLOYING MANUFACTURER  
TO ADOPT THE NEW METHOD OF CERTIFYING HIS GOODS

Certainly if ladies buy expensive chinas with the maker's and often in addition the retail seller's names painted and burned in them, they would not object to buying damask with the mark of highest excellence in a place apart from the design and where, in the necessary process of hemming, it can be turned in and obliterated, if for any reason desired.

The province of Ulster is peculiarly well adapted to the production of finished fine linen of all kinds. By finished is meant the growth of the flax, its manipulation through all the various stages of retting, scutching, spinning, weaving and bleaching, in perfect climatic conditions, the bleaching being perhaps the climax of its superiority in competition with other countries, for in the washing and bleaching processes, the Ulster men have the advantage of the water of the river Ban, said to be unequaled elsewhere for this purpose.

The Ban rises in the Mourne Mountains, County Down, and flows northward into the Atlantic, forming in its course, Lough Neagh, the largest body of water in the three kingdoms, covering 153 square miles, referred to pathetically by Tom Moore in his stirring song, "Let Erin remember the days of old."

"On Lough Neagh's bank, as the fisherman strays,  
When the clear cold eve's declining,  
He sees the round tow'rs of other days  
In the wave beneath him shining;  
Thus shall mem'ry often, in dreams sublime  
Catch a glimpse of the days that are over:  
Thus sighing, look thro' the waves of time  
For the long faded glories they cover."



SHOWING DETAIL OF HAND-WOVEN LINEN DOUBLE DAMASK

Weaving magnified four times. Photographed before bleaching. In this view the weft is made to show the lettering

While this water may not now have the crystal purity indicated by the poet's lines, owing to modern manufacturing methods along the banks of the upper Ban, it is yet true that it has been one of the leading reasons for the retention by Ulster and Ireland of the blue ribbon of excellence in linen manufacture for hundreds of years.

That Ireland will continue to rank first in this industry there can be no doubt, for it is still manned by the same blood that put it where it is, and the effort being now made by the younger men among the hand-loom damask weavers to bring about a revival of their forefathers' loved occupation, by the simple and honest method of making each article woven by their hands tell, of itself, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," should be successful.

It will then be possible for the ladies of this country to get a share of the fruit of Irish hand looms, which now goes almost exclusively to the titled aris-

tocracy of Europe and Asia and those locally conversant with its intrinsic superiority.

By patient, painstaking and intricate work, many generations of these weavers have built up a great industry, and the hope is that enough of a demand for their marked product will soon spring up, so that their many idle looms will again give forth the music of the flying shuttle.

Whether a revival comes or not, however, in one respect they will imitate the six hundred of the Light Brigade and the boy described in the following lines by Beth Day, and printed some years ago in the *Youth's Companion*, "they will do their best."

### THE BLIND WEAVER.

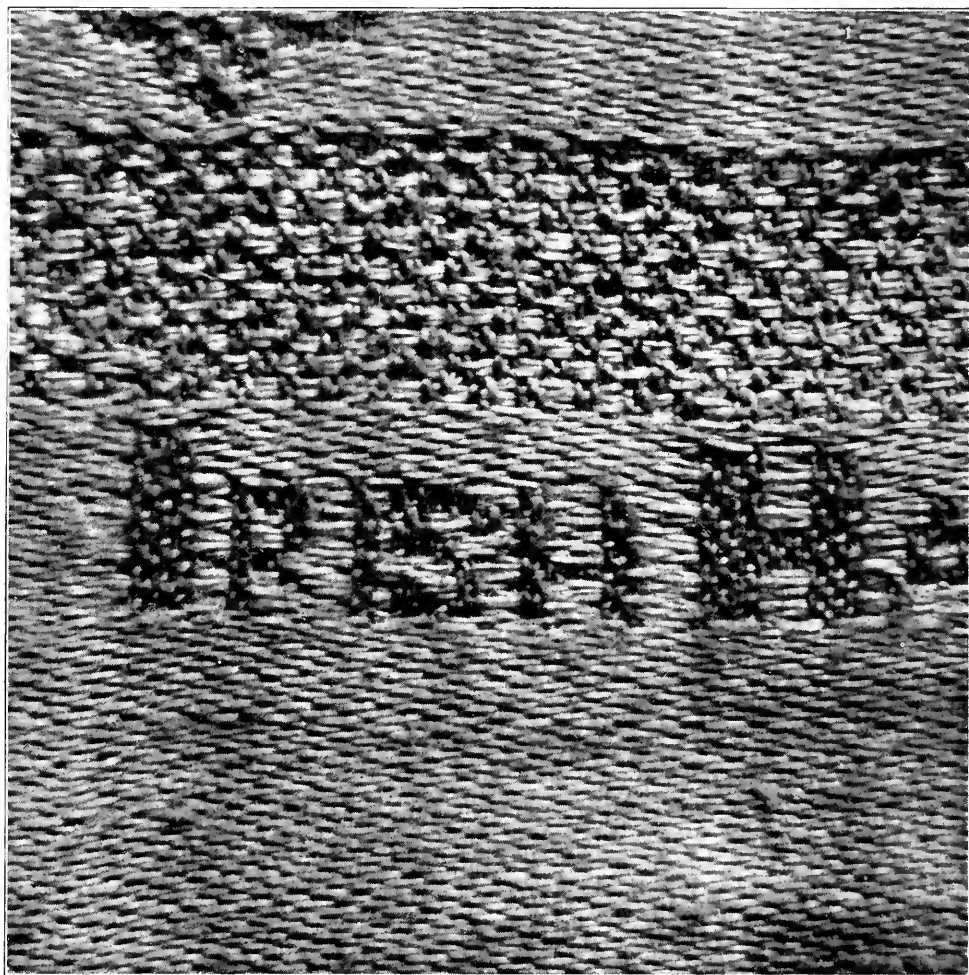
A blind boy stood beside the loom  
And wove a fabric. To and fro  
Beneath his firm and steady touch  
He made the busy shuttle go.

And oft the teacher passed that way  
And gave the colors, thread by thread:  
But by the boy the pattern fair  
Was all unseen. Its hues were dead.

"How can you weave?" we, pitying, cried.  
The blind boy smiled. "I do my best;  
I make the fabric firm and strong,  
And one who sees does all the rest."

Oh, happy thought! Beside life's loom  
We blindly strive our best to do,  
And he who marked the pattern out  
And holds the threads, will make it true.

NOTE:—The other linen hand-loom weavers, those who weave the plain, cambric, sheeting, toweling, etc., are also about to adopt some uniform mark to distinguish their product from that of the steam or power loom.



SHOWING DETAIL OF HAND-WOVEN LINEN DOUBLE DAMASK

Weaving magnified four times. Photographed before bleaching. In this view the warp is made to show the lettering.





CORNER OF DAMASK NAPKIN PHOTOGRAPHED IN BROWN STATE

The threads in the warp of this pattern (counting from left to right) number 130 to the inch, and in the weft 220 to the inch. The yarn necessary, therefore, to make a  $\frac{3}{4}$  napkin 27 inches square would, if laid in a single line, extend four miles and  $47\frac{1}{2}$  yards.

It is also interesting to think of the weaver throwing his shuttle 5940 times, and as often, by carefully measured strength of hands and arms, pressing each separate thread of the weft in place,  
in making one napkin



SHOWING HOW UNOBTRUSIVELY THE WORDS ARE  
WOVEN IN THE MARGIN OF A NAPKIN

One-half size of the actual lettering. In hemming they can be  
effaced by turning in if desired



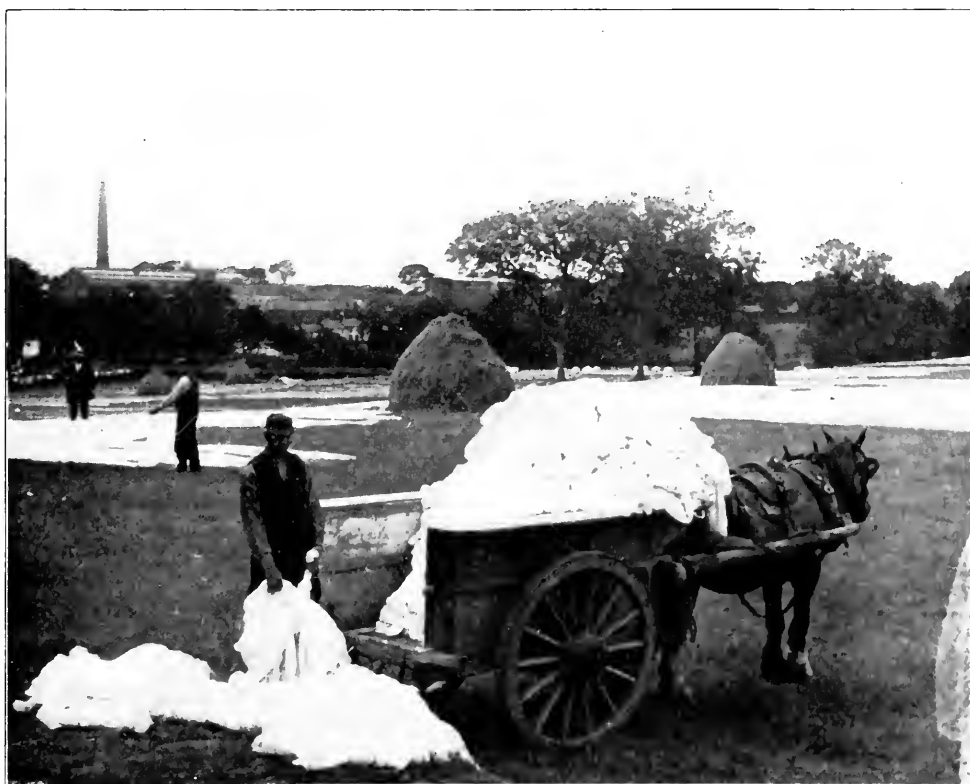
#### HAND-WOVEN LINEN DAMASK

Being grass-bleached at Lenaderg, County Down, on the River Ban.  
Three webs together in the foreground





ANOTHER VIEW IN THE EXTENSIVE BLEACH-GREENS AT LENADERG  
 Showing plain linen. Note the little watch-house, or shelter for the  
 night watchman, in the distance (center)



From stereograph; copyright 1907, by Underwood & Underwood, New York

BLEACHING-GREEN IN LISBURN, COUNTY DOWN

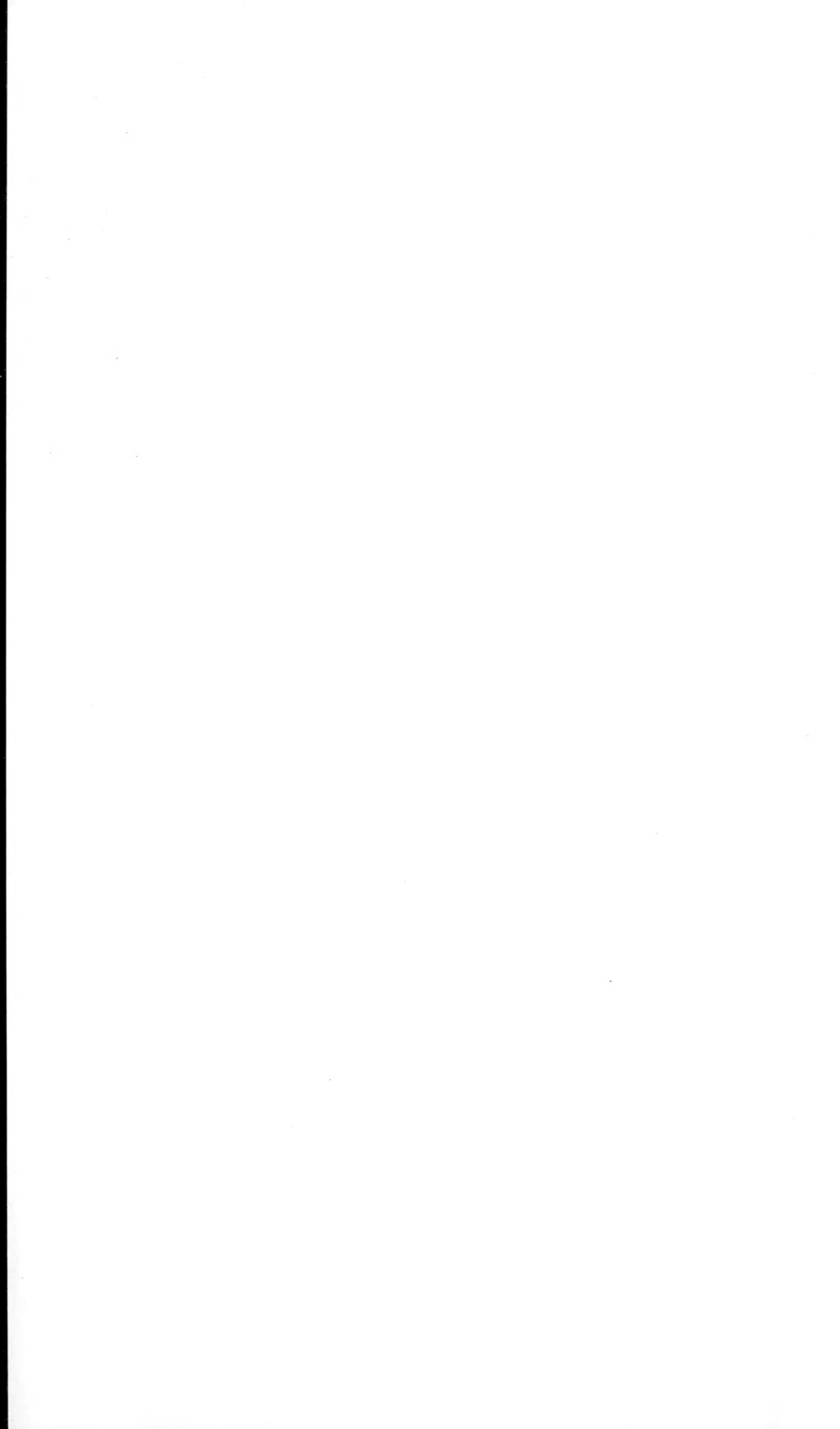


The shaded portion of the west part of County Down and North-east Armagh indicates the district where practically all the hand-loom Damask-weaving is done, the village of Waringstown being in the center of it



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